United Nations CEDAW/C/SR.1487

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.: General
7 March 2017

English only

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Sixty-sixth session

Summary record of the 1487th meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 23 February 2017, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Leinarte

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined seventh to ninth periodic reports of Rwanda (*continued*)
(CEDAW/C/RWA/7-9; CEDAW/C/RWA/Q/7-9 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Rwanda took places at the Committee table.*

Articles 10 to 14 (*continued*)

2. **Ms. Nyirasafari** (Rwanda) said that statistics on sexual harassment in the workplace from the 2016 report of the National Institute of Statistics would be made available to the Committee. A gender-based information management system was being put in place in collaboration with UN-Women, the World Bank and other partners, which would enable the Government to compile better statistics on gender-based violence, harassment and other matters raised by the Committee. With regard to the reintegration and employment of women ex-combatants, when they returned to the country they first passed through a centre where they received information on programmes and policies in various sectors and were assisted in developing projects that would enable them to earn a living after leaving the centre. They also received financial and material support for their projects and, where necessary, assistance in finding housing. A gender needs assessment recently commissioned by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugees and the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion would provide more information on what needed to be done to support women refugees and ex-combatants.

3. As for the lack of employment for Batwa women, they were part of the general population and were included in all support programmes for women. There were not any specific programmes for Batwa women. Under the National Employment Programme, a market had been constructed in Kigali to provide a place where women street vendors could set up and build their businesses. Each woman received a subsidy of about 5,000 Rwanda francs for that purpose. Three additional markets would be constructed in 2017.

4. There were four grounds on which termination of pregnancy was permitted as a Committee member had pointed out at the previous meeting. Some women had been imprisoned for having abortions in circumstances that did not meet one of the four conditions established under the Criminal Code. Recently, however, 62 of those women had received presidential pardons. The issue was being discussed within the framework of the Criminal Code reform currently under way, and the Government was in the process of analysing all the related issues. At the same time, it was conducting awareness-raising campaigns with a view to ensuring that women and girls knew how to prevent unwanted pregnancies and was working to expand the availability of reproductive health services. Health centres had been constructed in order to ensure that pregnant women would not have to walk more than five kilometres to receive care, and more centres would be constructed in the future in order to improve access to health services for women and for the population in general. Pregnant women could also use a toll-free telephone line to summon an ambulance to transport them to a health centre. A vaccination programme for girls 12 years of age was expected to reduce cervical cancer rates.

5. **Ms. Umurungi** (Rwanda) said that the main components of the reproductive health law were: safe motherhood; newborn care; family planning; prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV; prevention and treatment of infertility; prevention of gender-based violence; and awareness-raising measures aimed at changing attitudes. Not only pregnant women but also their husbands were tested for HIV with aim of preventing mother-to-child transmission of the infection.

6. **Ms. Acosta Vargas** said that, although the State party had made substantial progress with regard to key economic rights of women, women continued to experience high rates of unemployment and to find it difficult to achieve economic autonomy. She would like to know what was being done to facilitate access to bank loans and revolving funds for women, what sectors of the economy women generally invested in when they received

loans and whether they received economic advisory services aimed at ensuring the sustainability of their businesses. She also wished to know what loan guarantees were available to women and what amount of credit they could obtain, and she would welcome the delegation's views on whether the programmes currently in place were in fact contributing to women's economic autonomy. In addition, she would like information on the situation in the State party with regard to childcare and sharing of domestic work between women and men. Were there any shared childcare arrangements or other measures at the community level to facilitate women's participation in economic life? What measures were envisaged under the Vision 2020 Umurenge programme to promote economic development and reduce poverty among women and what were the main lines of action under the national decentralization policy aimed at enabling women to achieve the same level of economic participation as men? Lastly, she was aware that the State party had made a high-level political commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and she wondered whether that commitment incorporated a gender perspective in all its dimensions.

7. **Ms. Gabr**, noting that information received by the Committee indicated that almost 79 per cent of economically active women were engaged in agriculture-related activities, said that she would like to know to what extent those women performed unpaid, low-paid or informal work and what plans, programmes or strategies were in place to protect them. She also wished to know whether pensions were available to rural women who were divorced or widowed and how such women obtained health and other basic social services. She would welcome statistics on land ownership among women. She would also appreciate clarification of the situation with regard to inheritance of land by women and women's access to agricultural technology, which appeared to be limited.

8. The Committee had also received information indicating that rural women were disadvantaged in comparison with their urban counterparts and that significant numbers of them were illiterate. She would like to know what steps the State party was taking to tackle those problems and, in general, to implement the Committee's general recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women. She applauded the State party's One Cow per Poor Family programme, although men appeared to be benefiting from it to a greater extent than women. She wondered whether the State party had assessed the impact of the programme and, if so, whether it had proved successful in improving the lot of poor families.

9. She understood that ethnicity was a sensitive issue for the State party, but the fact remained that there were groups that had traditionally been marginalized. She would like to know what was being done to protect such groups, especially women from the Batwa community. In particular, she would like information on measures to reduce illiteracy and unemployment among Batwa women. She welcomed the State party's ratification of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, but noted that it continued to maintain its reservation concerning the right to determine refugees' place of residence and to establish limits on their freedom of movement. She wondered whether it intended to withdraw that reservation. She commended the State party's acceptance of a significant number of refugees. She would like to know, however, how the State party protected women refugees from exploitation. Lastly, she wished to know what steps the State party was taking to ensure that the rights of older women were protected, in keeping with the Committee's general recommendation No. 27.

10. **Ms. Nyirasafari** (Rwanda) said that the National Employment Programme provided funding for projects launched by women and young people. In each sector there were project advisers who assisted women and youths in developing projects. A guarantee fund provided microfinancing to enable women to carry out their projects or start a business. Individual women were able to obtain up to 3 million Rwanda francs. Cooperatives were entitled to larger amounts. The Government had provided for childcare services that operated at the local level. Any woman with children under 6 years of age could leave their children at a centre while she was at work. The centres taught children about hygiene, how to get along with others and other topics and also offered programmes for parents on hygiene, diet and nutrition and related subjects. The programme was expected to help more women take up paid employment. The Government was also working to change attitudes

among men and encourage them to take on a greater share of household chores in order to reduce the burden on women.

11. Gender was incorporated in a cross-cutting manner in all national planning documents, plans and programmes, including Vision 2020. All sectoral institutions were required to integrate a gender perspective in their plans. Social services were provided for women in rural areas as they were for the rest of the population. The Vision 2020 Umurenge programme provided for the employment of women who would otherwise be at home in public works, enabling them to earn a wage, and the financing of income-generating activities for poor women.

12. Women who obtained a divorce had the legal right to a share of the marital property in accordance with the law on matrimonial regimes, family gifts and succession. Following the assessment carried out by the Gender Monitoring Office and the campaign to raise awareness of the issue of land registration, the proportion of heads of household who owned land had reached 88 per cent for women and 89 per cent for men. However, some married couples jointly owned their land in accordance with their matrimonial regime. The "One Cow per Poor Family" programme had been successful in improving nutritional standards for families and helping them to earn a certain amount of money from the sale of milk. Batwa women were no more marginalized than other women in Rwanda. They were integrated into society and benefited from the measures taken to enhance the rights of all women.

13. **Ms. Ameline** said that she wished to know whether the State party ensured that women played an equal role in drawing up plans and taking decisions in relation to the digital economy, sustainable development, the provision of health services and solar energy.

14. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** said that it would be useful if the delegation could provide data disaggregated by gender, region, minority group and other categories in order to give the Committee a clear picture of the situation of Batwa women, former women combatants and other groups.

15. **Ms. Acosta Vargas** said that she wished to know which sectors of the economy women invested in and which institutions provided credit and revolving funds.

16. **Ms. Gabr** said that it was not clear whether one-stop centres for victims of gender-based violence would also be established in rural areas, whether their staff received continuous training and how victims who sought refuge in such centres were reintegrated into society.

17. **Ms. Chalal** said that she wished to know whether one-stop centres were financially independent and whether they would be established around the country. She would welcome further information on the prevalence of early pregnancy in refugee camps.

18. Ms. **Schulz** said that she wished to know what proportion of the women placed in detention had been convicted for acts relating to abortion. Noting that the criminalization of abortion endangered women's lives by forcing them to have clandestine abortions in unsafe conditions, she asked whether the delegation could provide some indication of the direction in which the review of the State party's legislation on abortion was moving.

19. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that she had not yet received an answer to her questions concerning the victims and perpetrators of sexual harassment in schools and whether guidelines on sexual harassment had been circulated. Furthermore, it was still not clear what types of vocational and adult education were provided, which subjects were taught and how many women enrolled on such courses. Gender-disaggregated data on the number of girls and women who studied science and technical subjects at the secondary and tertiary levels had not yet been provided.

20. She wished to know what steps had been taken to increase women's participation in leadership roles in education and whether the State party would consider taking temporary special measures to increase their participation. She asked whether peace education and sexual and reproductive health education were provided in refugee camps and what steps were taken to ensure that girls could continue their education when they left the camps. Lastly, she asked whether the national policy on girls' education covered girls with

disabilities, whether the barriers to education faced by girls with disabilities were being removed, whether teachers received training in inclusive education and whether the right to education of girls with disabilities in rural areas was being upheld.

21. **Ms. Song** said that she wished to know how jointly owned land belonging to a married couple in a rural area would be distributed if that couple decided to divorce.

22. **Ms. Verges** said that she wished to know what social protection measures were in place to safeguard the rights of women working in rural areas and what efforts were being made to increase women's participation in rural affairs.

23. **Ms. Nyirasafari** (Rwanda) said that women were encouraged to study all subjects, including information technology and other subjects previously considered to be more suited to men. The Government was in the process of establishing infrastructure that would enable it to collect and process data related to gender in general and gender-based violence in particular. It was hoped that such data would be available by the time that her delegation submitted its next report.

24. Banks and microfinance institutions established around the country helped women to launch income-generating projects by reviewing or helping to draft business plans. The National Employment Programme, under which a specific budget had been set aside for job creation, helped women to access funding required for their projects. The Ministry of Employment had also established a national programme that aimed to increase employment among women. One-stop centres would be established in rural areas and in each district hospital to ensure that timely support would be provided to victims of gender-based violence. The police investigators, doctors, psychologists, legal advisers and other staff involved in such centres received regular training. As each staff member was paid by the government ministry associated with his or her profession — with doctors being paid by the Ministry of Health and investigators by the Ministry of Justice, for example — one-stop centres could not be said to be financially independent. However, the Government intended to introduce reforms that would enable them to function independently. A national steering committee would address the various problems faced by the centres and draw up recommendations intended to enhance their performance.

25. **Ms. Umurungi** (Rwanda) said that she would check with the Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs whether any plans were in place to withdraw the reservation made to article 26 of the Convention. The Government had established the Business Development Fund, which provided women with credit guarantees that made it easier for them to obtain financing from microfinance institutions, cooperative banks and other establishments.

26. **Ms. Batete** (Rwanda) said that, in order to address the discrepancy in the types of subjects studied by boys and girls, the Government had undertaken measures that had increased the percentage of girls who undertook technical and vocational education and training. Aware of the fact that a discrepancy still persisted, the Government had commissioned a nationwide assessment to identify the obstacles that prevented girls from enrolling on courses that led to higher paid jobs. Scholarships, mentoring schemes and other measures had been introduced to encourage more girls to study technical subjects.

27. **Mr. Ngarambe** (Rwanda) said that an increasing number of men and women were benefiting from access to credit and from education and training that enabled them to undertake income-generating activities. Even in the agricultural sector, where credit had traditionally been hard to obtain, similar proportions of men and women submitted applications for credit. The approval rate of credit applications in rural areas had increased significantly — to over 93 per cent for women and 89 per cent for men — owing to intensive campaigns to raise awareness about available credit schemes.

28. **Ms. Nyirasafari** (Rwanda) said that campaigns to raise women's awareness of the problem of sexual harassment and gender-based violence had been carried out in refugee camps. A community police force had been established in the camps, which received complaints from victims of gender-based violence and provided them with information and advice. A pension scheme had been set up that enabled older persons to receive a monthly pension.

Articles 15 and 16

29. **Ms. Nwankwo** said that she commended the Government on the steps that it had taken to put men and women on an equal footing in respect of contract law, land inheritance, land ownership and other legislative areas. However, patriarchal attitudes, cultural practices and discriminatory legal provisions, among other factors, prevented women's rights from being fully realized and implemented. The implementation of land tenure reform had led to an increase in family disputes over land which had a disproportionate impact on women. Some men continued to reject the idea that women could inherit land and be registered on title documents as equal owners. Although women in de facto unions and polygamous marriages made direct and indirect contributions to the purchase and enhancement of a family's land, they were not granted any legal right to it. By contrast, men in de facto unions were able to register land and other assets in their names and were not subject to the same requirements for having legal title to property that applied to married couples. As a result, men sometimes preferred to avoid entering into marriage. Article 39 of Act No. 59/2008 on the Prevention and Punishment of Gender-Based Violence attempted to rectify the problem by allowing unmarried couples to regularize their union so that commonly owned property would be equally distributed. However, women who attempted to invoke the provisions in question in court were obliged to prove that they co-owned the property concerned.

30. In view of the situation described, she asked whether the Government planned to amend legislation on property rights to ensure that women in de facto unions and polygamous marriages had the same legal protection as women in conventional, monogamous marriages. She asked what steps the Government was taking to challenge established customs and practices that prevented women from fully enjoying their rights and to raise the public's awareness of the new family and succession laws, particularly in rural areas and among traditional leaders and local authorities.

31. She asked whether the Government intended to amend the discriminatory provisions which prevented widows, but not widowers, from remarrying until 300 days had elapsed since the death of their spouse. Would the Government also address the fact that couples were not legally required to divide their assets and liabilities equally following divorce or separation? It was still not clear whether any plans were in place to amend the discriminatory provisions of the Family Code as the Committee had recommended in its previous concluding observations (CEDAW/C/RWA/CO/6, para. 42).

32. **Ms. Nyirasafari** (Rwanda) said that awareness-raising campaigns were being carried out to reach the sections of society were still hostile to the idea that men and women enjoyed equal rights to property under the law. The matrimonial regime governing the ownership of property applied only to married couples. The Government had no plans to recognize de facto unions and encouraged persons living in such unions to register them with the authorities. However, unmarried men and women who separated after living together in a consensual union had the opportunity to show the authorities what they had contributed to the purchase of a property that they had acquired together. Children born of de facto unions had the same rights as those born of married parents. The legislation that prevented widows from remarrying until a certain number of days had elapsed had now been abolished.

33. **Ms. Umurungi** (Rwanda) said that the legislation introduced in 2015, in conjunction with the law on matrimonial regimes, established men and women as equal partners in marriage and ensured that their property would be equally divided in the event of divorce.

34. **Ms. Patten**, noting that the requirements placed on national and international NGOs under Act No. 04/2012 and Act No. 05/2012 were onerous, asked whether the Government would consider amending the legislation in question to allow such organizations to operate more freely.

35. **Ms. Gabr** said that she wished to know whether amendments would be made to the Family Code to ensure that the ban on polygamy would be fully implemented in practice.

36. **Ms. Nyirasafari** (Rwanda) said that polygamy was banned under the Criminal Code. There was no need to introduce new legislation on the practice, as it was prohibited under the Constitution as well. Concerning the question raised about non-governmental organizations, it was true that there was a law governing the process of registering NGOs and other not-for-profit organizations currently in force, as the Committee members had noted.

37. **The Chair**, thanking the delegation for the constructive dialogue, which had provided further insight into the situation of women in Rwanda, said that the Committee encouraged the State party to take all necessary measures to carry out the various recommendations that would be issued.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.